

Chicago metro area losing its families

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Greg Hinz on
Politics



Slow population growth in the metropolitan area is mostly concentrated among families with children, a reflection of the Chicago region's lagging recovery from the subprime recession.

That's the bottom line of [a new report from the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning](#) that takes a look at new census estimates for the metropolitan area and compares them with peer cities around the country.

The study starts with something that's already been reported: According to American Community Survey estimates by the U.S. Census Bureau, both [the metro area](#) and [the city proper](#) had little growth between 2011 and 2016, with the seven-county region actually losing people in the past two years and the city for the past three years. That's worse than in metro Los Angeles, Philadelphia, New York and Washington, though the spread among the five has narrowed recently, according to CMAP.

What's new is the age breakdown of the population shift.

In the Chicago area between 2005 and 2016, population rose in the 20-34 age bracket and those over 50. But it dropped among those 0-19 and 35-49, almost certainly households with an adult or couple and their children, said Liz Schuh, CMAP's principal policy analyst and author of the study. Peer metros had similar trends, but Chicago lagged a little behind them by this and most other measures.

To double-check, CMAP compared the new data with previous census figures on distribution of households by single-person and by family, with the latter defined as at least one adult living with a related child.

Of the five metros, Chicago alone lost families overall, with the share of households comprising families dropping

from about 67 percent in 2005 to about 65 percent in 2015. But single-person households grew faster here than in other cities, in part because of single young adults but mostly because of aging baby boomers who now are living alone, Schuh said.

What's responsible?

"Population trends are closely related to changes in economic opportunity," the report concludes. "Reversing population decline in the CMAP region will require fostering strong economic opportunities."

I would add that while the other metros earlier were growing three times or even faster than Chicago, their rate of increase now is much closer to ours, partially excepting New York.

Other data I'll report on later suggest that the region is growing richer even as it shrinks a bit, with a particular decline in low-income African-Americans in Cook County. More on that data when the researchers crunch it a bit further.